

Growing and Preserving an Academic Library Facebook Community

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Abstract

To increase the size of our Facebook community, librarians at Loyola Marymount University combined Facebook ads targeted to current students and alumni with a “Facebook Fan Drive” in which we posted a weekly prompt, such as “describe one thing you would change about the library,” or “share a photo of the library.” We then randomly selected participants to win prizes. In just four weeks, our number of fans / likes increased tenfold, and today, we have nearly 3000 followers, 800 check-ins, and a small but steady level of user interaction. We will describe the successful growth of the LMU Library Facebook community, and share data regarding our peer institutions’ outreach efforts using the social network. Then, we will lead the audience in a discussion to brainstorm new ways to engage and interact with our respective library Facebook communities.

Discussion

Introduction

With 800 million users and counting, Facebook is an increasingly ubiquitous-- and free -- online platform upon which academic libraries can connect and engage with their community. 24 of 28 peer institutions within the Association of Jesuit Colleges and Universities updated their Facebook pages with fresh content in February 2012. We surveyed our peer libraries, and of the 19 respondents, the majority are promoting their Facebook pages via links from their library web sites, and are posting content that promotes events, services and collections. Across these 19 institutions, 58 library staff members participate in generating content for their Facebook page. The number of “likes” we found on these Facebook pages ranged from 40 up to 856. Considering that only a small percentage of followers actively engage with a Facebook page, the reach of these pages may be fairly small given the resources dedicated to them. With our “like” count above 2,900, we are motivated to make the effort to engage our audience and determine what types of Facebook content inspires engagement, and what seems to pass by unnoticed and unremarked upon.

Description

We began with a brief narrative about the history of social networking efforts at Loyola Marymount University (LMU), culminating in our creation of a Facebook page. We examined statistics comparing Facebook use and activity among our peer institutions, emphasizing the relative success we at LMU have had with building an audience of people who “like” our Page. Finally, we described our advertising campaign and Fan Drives, which we credit with building our audience, and we discussed the types of posts that drive the most interaction with our

community. After our presentation, attendees broke up into groups of four or five, and brainstormed responses to any or all of the following prompts:

- How do you use Facebook? Think personally, not as a librarian.
- Think of companies, places, or products that you have Liked
 - How did you find out that they had a Page?
 - Why did you Like them?
 - What compels you to write a comment or share a photo, or otherwise engage with a Page beyond the initial Like?
- What are public libraries doing on Facebook that academic libraries can draw from?

We then asked each individual attendee to spend a few minutes responding to the following prompt: Write down three unique things about your library that you want to share with your community. How might you turn these into an interesting Facebook post; one that in turn might encourage your fans to Like, share, or comment on your activity?

We asked the groups to engage in a lightning-round sharing of the ideas they wrote down individually, and to identify at least one thought or idea that they would like to share. We went around to each group, giving them a chance to share and discuss these ideas.

At the conclusion of our session, we opened up the floor to additional questions.

Key Points

The following are the key points that we hope each attendee of our discussion session was able to take away:

1. Advertising works.

For our first Fan Drive, we invested approximately \$750 over the course of a month to purchase Facebook ads, and the number of Likes in our LMU Library Facebook community grew tenfold. One ad was targeted to LMU alumni, and the other to individuals under 22 who identified themselves as being affiliated with LMU. The metrics that Facebook provided us with proved that a high percentage of our new Likes were a direct result of the ads.

2. Likes are not the same as engagement.

Although the Facebook ads were an essential element in increasing the number of Likes on our page, their usefulness stopped there. It is our responsibility to keep our LMU Library Facebook page updated with lively, interesting content that engages our users. The model that we developed for a month-long Fan Drive was one mechanism to get our users engaging with us (and each other) in a variety of ways, whether through answering simple questions about their experiences with the library or sharing photographs.

3. What you're using Facebook for may not be what your users are likely to engage with.

The majority of the AJCU survey respondents indicated that the primary use of their Facebook page was to promote programs, workshops, and events. In our experience over the past two years, these are the types of posts that are the *least* likely to elicit any sort of response (likes,

shares, or comments) on Facebook, nor are they directly responsible for significantly increasing attendance at a particular program as a result of the post.

This is not to say that this type of promotion should not be done via Facebook, because the investment of time is minimal, and we found that it certainly doesn't hurt as a part of a larger marketing and communication plan. But for libraries hoping to create a vibrant and interesting Facebook page that will draw their users' attention time and time again, we found that the following types of posts are much more likely to elicit feedback, and more important, sharing and interaction between members of the community.

- Photographs
- Community kudos
- National or international library or library-related news
- Posts shared from other LMU campus social media outlets
- Conversational/informally toned posts
- Relevant, thoughtfully timed announcements

4. Assessing the success/value of a library's Facebook page is challenging, but necessary.

The number of overall Likes on a Facebook page isn't an effective measure of the return on the time invested in its maintenance. The number of Likes on any given post doesn't tell the whole story, either. Is it the same few people Liking everything the library posts? Do the Likes actually result in any further engagement with or because of the library? The most valuable form of assessment that we've performed thus far has been to gauge the interaction inspired by library posts: not only interaction with library staff, but interaction amongst members of our community. When our library fosters interaction in this way, it is furthering its mission to become a central part of the campus community, both physically and virtually.

Facebook makes assessment difficult, because some factors cannot be accounted for. Each person's timeline may highlight or bury library posts, depending on that person's past level of engagement with the library page. There is no way to measure views of a post when the views don't result in a click of some kind. It is for this reason that we focus on the engagement we can see as a result of any given post.

Discussion

During the discussion session, participants came up with thoughtful comments about their own Facebook habits, including the following, which we felt were useful perspectives for libraries to consider when planning content for their Facebook pages:

- I am more likely to Like something if I see that a friend has Liked it
- I Like something if I feel like it fits with my online persona (ie. I'm not likely to Like something if I don't want that action to publicly show up in my feed)
- I Like things that are local and feel personal

In the final activity of the session, we asked the participants to brainstorm 3-5 unique things that they have going on at their library or ideas for posts that they felt might elicit engagement from their respective Facebook communities. We collected all of the responses and sent the aggregated data to everyone who attended. Highlights include:

- “Name this location” game: post a close up or abstract photo of a place or thing in the library that people can win prizes for guessing.
- We have a 150-station computer lab upstairs on the 4th floor. Yes, it has all the software! How will you use it?
- We have a great YA book collection. Give us your suggestions to keep it current.
- Feature our Peer Reference Assistants: do a bio with photo or a 10Qs like Vanity Fair
- Rearranging furniture: ask students to rearrange seating areas, take photos and post to Facebook, then vote on best configurations.
- We are planning to move back to a renovated building. Post photos and info about the plans and architecture as it develops. Engage students in the process from current location.
- My college is located in a desert environment. We have a special collection of books about deserts all around the globe and southwest. Encourage the use of this resource.
- Archive Collection: encourage students to post a photo of a similar topic or memory.
- Photos of librarians with fun facts. “Like” if you know this person.
- Nice window views: post favorite window seat view for a prize (best photo).